ASTR 202 – Exploration of the Solar System
Spring 2014

Instructor: **Prof. Stephen Bradshaw (302 Herman Brown Hall, ext. 4045)**
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Class Website: **Owl Space**
Lectures: **Tuesday and Thursday, 9:25am – 10:00am, KCK 100**
Office Hours: **After each class and by email appointment**
Teaching Assistants: Arpan Bhowmik, Landon Blair, Adam Lauchner

Course Description

This course is intended to provide an introduction to the fundamentals of modern astronomy and our current understanding of the solar system. The course is designed to satisfy Group III distribution requirements. Students majoring (or intending to major) in astronomy / astrophysics are better served by the course ASTR 350 (Introduction to Astrophysics - Stars). If you are currently undecided about your major then ASTR 202 and its companion ASTR 201 (Stars, Galaxies, and the Universe) are good places to begin determining where your interests lie.

Exploration of the Solar System starts with an overview of the universe and our place within it, before embarking upon a tour of the solar system to learn about its major features and how it came to be. During the first part of the course we will cover the fundamentals of astronomy such as the motion of celestial bodies, why understanding these motions matters to us on Earth, and the game-changing moment in the development of astronomy - the invention of the telescope. These will all be placed in their historical context and the interesting characters responsible for some of the great innovations will be introduced.

In the second part of the course we will investigate the geological features and atmospheric conditions of Earth and the other terrestrial worlds, and the properties of the Jovian (or giant) planets. Along the way we will encounter asteroids, meteorites and comets, before leaving the solar system altogether to discover new worlds orbiting distant stars.

Throughout the course we will emphasize how basic physics, such as the concepts of energy and temperature, conservation laws, the gravitational force, and the interaction of light and matter, has led us to our present appreciation and understanding of the fascinating objects that we see in our skies.

Prerequisites

No scientific or mathematical background beyond high school physics and algebra is assumed. The homework problem sets will not require calculus, but will involve equations and making calculations. Remember that they are designed to reinforce what you learn, not to catch you out. Examples relevant to the homework problem sets will be worked through during class.

Course Textbook

The text for this course is:

The Cosmic Perspective: The Solar System with MasteringAstronomy (7th edition);
by Bennett, Donahue, Schneider and Voit;
published by Addison-Wesley;
ISBN-10 0321841069;
ISBN-13 978-0321841063.

If you are also planning to take ASTR 201 then you may instead purchase the following text:

The Cosmic Perspective with MasteringAstronomy (7th edition);
by Bennett, Donahue, Schneider and Voit;
published by Addison-Wesley;
ISBN-10 0321839552;
ISBN-13 978-0321839558.

The first book contains only the material that we will cover in ASTR 202. The second book contains all of the material for ASTR 201 and ASTR 202. Both books come with access to the website MasteringAstronomy, which provides a large amount of supplementary course material that it is strongly recommended you make use of. If you have a used copy of either textbook then you can purchase access to the website separately at: www.masteringastronomy.com. **Note that the 6th edition of both textbooks is also available. The 6th edition is suitable for this course and significantly less expensive.**

Class Website

All course materials including problem sets, links to relevant websites, supplementary material, and class updates and announcements will be posted on the ASTR 202 Owl Space page. It is the responsibility of the student to check Owl Space regularly for the most recent information concerning the class.

Special Needs

If you have a documented disability that requires special consideration for this class then please contact the professor as soon as possible to discuss your needs. Students with disabilities should also contact the Disability Support Services Office in the Ley Student Center (dss.rice.edu).

Assessment

The Honor Code applies to all assessment tasks. You can review Rice's Honor Council documentation online at: honor.rice.edu/index.cfm

Homework problem sets: There will be weekly problem sets with questions from the course text and other questions at the same level that will be based on the material covered during the previous week. A problem set will be posted on Owl Space each Tuesday and will be due in class (or immediately before class if submitted online) the following Tuesday. The problem sets will be take-home and open-book. You may (indeed, should) discuss general concepts with your classmates before attempting the questions, but your answers must be the result of your own understanding of the material and you should therefore write up the solutions to each problem set by yourself.

Popular science writing assignment: Features on the solar system often appear in the news and this short project is an opportunity for you to learn more about the science behind the stories. Choose a recent solar system article that interests you from the popular media and then write a report about the science upon which it is based. Questions that you may like to consider in your report are: how much science does the journalist leave out of the article? Is the science that is included reported faithfully or is it misrepresented? Does the article give the non-scientist reader an accurate and honest account of the scientists' work? The report may contain pictures, diagrams and equations (as long as you can explain them in your own words), and be no more than 1000 words in length. You will be assessed on your understanding of the material (expressing what you have learned in your own words), the quality of your analysis and discussion, and your ability to connect the material with topics that we cover in class. Marks will be deducted for poor spelling and grammar because the ability to communicate clearly (in this case by the written word) is a critically important skill to develop.

You should keep your eye out for any interesting solar system-based stories in the news. The Fondren carries the latest popular science journals (e.g. Nature, Science, etc.) and provide access to the online editions. A list of other sources is available on the Owl Space page (under ASTR 202 / Resources / News Sites), but is not exhaustive. Check with the professor when you have chosen an article to make sure that it is suitable. This assignment will be due at the beginning of class on **Thursday 10th April 2014**.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated and the professor has no discretion about whether to report it. The procedure for dealing with cases of suspected plagiarism is manifestly unpleasant and stressful (for student and professor), and emphatically not worth the risk to your academic career and to your future. Your work should be clearly distinguishable from its sources and be a direct result of your own understanding of the material. For a guide to what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it please consult the Honor Council's document concerning academic fraud: honor.rice.edu/bluebook.cfm?doc_id=10355

Attendance and Participation

Students who attend class regularly will be at a significant advantage because material not included in the textbook or class presentations made available on Owl Space is often featured during class. Furthermore, the examples that will be worked through during class are directly applicable to the homework problem sets. You are expected to participate actively in class activities and to ask questions.

Grades

Task	Weighting
14 problem sets	70%
Popular science writing assignment	30%

The overall percentage grade (PG) will be calculated from the percentage grade awarded for each task, with the appropriate weighting. The letter grade will be determined from the overall percentage grade by:

$PG \geq 90\%$ (A±); $80\% \leq PG < 90\%$ (B±); $70\% \leq PG < 80\%$ (C±); $60\% \leq PG < 70\%$ (D±); $PG < 60\%$ (F)

You do not need to have a scientific background to get a high grade. However, you will need to work hard and regularly to achieve a top grade. This includes attending class, completing all of the problem sets and talking to the professor as soon as possible when difficulties arise. Misunderstandings can often be cleared up quickly and easily, but if left to fester they will adversely affect your grade and may well spoil your enjoyment of the course.

Cellphones and Laptop Computers, etc.

Cellphones must be switched off upon entering the classroom.

Laptop computers, netbooks, iPads, etc., may be used for the purpose of note taking only. Other activities are likely to be extremely distracting for others sitting nearby. If non-course-based electronic-device use becomes a problem during the semester then an in-class ban will be implemented.

Observing Sessions

The Rice University Campus Observatory (RUCO: http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~ruco/observatory.html) provides an excellent opportunity for hands-on stargazing. Nighttime observing sessions will be scheduled during the semester. However, as with most Earth-based astronomical endeavors, we are at the mercy of the weather and the local 'seeing' conditions. This means that observing sessions may be organized and cancelled at unavoidably short notice. The best nights for practical astronomy are clear and cold, so you are advised to dress warmly.

Class Schedule (tentative)

January

(1) Tuesday	14th	-	Part I: Ch. 1. Our Place in the Universe
(2) Thursday	16th	-	Part I: Ch. 1. Our Place in the Universe
(3) Tuesday	21st	-	Part I: Ch. 2. Discovering the Universe
(4) Thursday	23rd	-	Part I: Ch. 2. Discovering the Universe
(5) Tuesday	28th	-	Part I: Ch. 3. The Science of Astronomy
(6) Thursday	30th	-	Part I: Ch. 3. The Science of Astronomy

February

(7) Tuesday	4th	-	Part I: Ch. 4. Making Sense of the Universe
(8) Thursday	6th	-	Part I: Ch. 4. Making Sense of the Universe
(9) Tuesday	11th	-	Part I: Ch. 5. Light and Matter
(10) Thursday	13th	-	Part I: Ch. 5. Light and Matter
(11) Tuesday	18th	-	Part I: Ch. 5. Light and Matter
(12) Thursday	20th	-	Part I: Ch. 5. Light and Matter & Part I: Ch. 6. Telescopes
(13) Tuesday	25th	-	Part I: Ch. 6. Telescopes
(14) Thursday	27th	-	Part I: Ch. 6. Telescopes & Part V: Ch. 14. The Sun

March

Tuesday	**4th**	**-**	**SPRING BREAK (NO CLASSES)**
Thursday	**6th**	**-**	**SPRING BREAK (NO CLASSES)**
(15) Tuesday	11th	-	Part V: Ch. 14. The Sun
(16) Thursday	13th	-	Part V: Ch. 14. The Sun & Part III: Ch. 7. Our Planetary System
(17) Tuesday	18th	-	Part III: Ch. 7. Our Planetary System
(18) Thursday	20th	-	Part III: Ch. 7. Our Planetary System & Part III: Ch. 8. Formation of the Solar System
(19) Tuesday	25th	-	Part III: Ch. 8. Formation of the Solar System
(20) Thursday	27th	-	Part III: Ch. 8. Formation of the Solar System & Part III: Ch. 9. Planetary Geology: Earth and Other Terrestrial Worlds

April

(21) Tuesday	1st	-	Part III: Ch. 9. Planetary Geology: Earth and Other Terrestrial Worlds
Thursday	**3rd**	**-**	**MIDTERM RECESS (NO CLASSES)**
(22) Tuesday	8th	-	Part III: Ch. 9. Planetary Geology: Earth and Other Terrestrial Worlds & Part III: Ch. 10. Planetary Atmospheres: Earth and Other Terrestrial Worlds
(23) Thursday	10th	-	Part III: Ch. 10. Planetary Atmospheres: Earth and Other Terrestrial Worlds

(24) Tuesday	15th	-	Part III: Ch. 10. Planetary Atmospheres: Earth and Other Terrestrial Worlds & Part III: Ch. 11. Jovian Planet Systems
(25) Thursday	17th	-	Part III: Ch. 11. Jovian Planet Systems
(26) Tuesday	22nd	-	Part III: Ch. 11. Jovian Planet Systems & Part III: Ch. 12. Asteroids, Comets & Dwarf Planets: Nature, Orbits & Impacts
(27) Thursday	24th	-	Part III: Ch. 12. Asteroids, Comets & Dwarf Planets: Nature, Orbits & Impacts

Summary of Problem Set and Written Assignment Deadlines

Deadlines are strictly enforced. Requests for extensions must be granted by the professor (by email, so that a written record exists) BEFORE the due date of the assignment. You will need a valid reason accompanied by supporting documentation.

January

(3) Tuesday	21st	-	Problem Set 1 (C1-2) distributed
(5) Tuesday	28th	-	Problem Set 1 (C1-2) due. Problem Set 2 (C3-4) distributed

February

(7) Tuesday	4th	-	Problem Set 2 (C3-4) due. Problem Set 3 (C5-6) distributed
(9) Tuesday	11th	-	Problem Set 3 (C5-6) due. Problem Set 4 (C7-8) distributed
(11) Tuesday	18th	-	Problem Set 4 (C7-8) due. Problem Set 5 (C9-10) distributed
(13) Tuesday	25th	-	Problem Set 5 (C9-10) due. Problem Set 6 (C11-12) distributed

March

(15) Tuesday	11th	-	Problem Set 6 (C11-12) due. Problem Set 7 (C13-14) distributed
(17) Tuesday	18th	-	Problem Set 7 (C13-14) due. Problem Set 8 (C15-16) distributed
(19) Tuesday	25th	-	Problem Set 8 (C15-16) due. Problem Set 9 (C17-18) distributed

April

(21) Tuesday	1st	-	Problem Set 9 (C17-18) due. Problem Set 10 (C19) distributed
(22) Tuesday	8th	-	Problem Set 10 (C19) due. Problem Set 11 (C20-21) distributed
(24) Tuesday	15th	-	Problem Set 11 (C20-21) due. Problem Set 12 (C22-23) distributed
(26) Tuesday	22nd	-	Problem Set 12 (C22-23) due. Problem Set 13 (C24-25) distributed
(27) Thursday	24th	-	Problem Set 14 (C26-27) distributed

May

Wednesday	7th	-	Problem Sets 13 (C24-25) and 14 (C26-27) due no later than 5pm

Notes: (CX-Y) indicates that the questions will be based only on the material covered in classes X to Y